

Statement for the Record of Representative Anna G. Eshoo
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Energy Subcommittee and Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee
“Out of Control: The Impact of Wildfires on our Power Sector and the Environment”
2123 Rayburn House Office Building
January 28, 2020

Chairman Rush and Chairman Tonko,

Thank you for the legislative courtesy to participate in today’s hearing. Wildfires have been a devastating threat in California over the past three years, and I appreciate the Committee’s attention to this critically important issue.

The wildfires in Australia that have burned over 16 million acres have captured the world’s attention and shown that this is a global issue. However, California has been hit particularly hard, having recently endured two of its worst wildfire seasons in a row. Fifteen of the twenty most destructive wildfires in California’s history occurred in the last two decades. The most destructive, the 2018 Camp Fire which killed 85 people and destroyed over 18,000 buildings, was linked to PG&E’s faulty powerlines. The second-worst fire which occurred in the wine country the year before was also caused by PG&E’s equipment.

Silicon Valley has been fortunate that none of these fires have directly threatened our community, but we have felt their impacts in other ways. Because wildfire smoke can drift hundreds of miles across the entire state, my constituents were exposed to toxic contaminants that are particularly dangerous to children and the elderly and can trigger wheezing, burning eyes, and even aggravate chronic heart and lung diseases. I’ve introduced H.R. 4924, the *Smoke Planning and Research Act* to give local governments additional resources to mitigate this public health threat and improve air filtration systems at schools so students can stay in class.

My constituents have also been subjected to PG&E’s intentional preemptive blackouts, officially known as “Public Safety Power Shutoffs” (PSPS). Losing power temporarily is preferable to losing lives, but these blackouts place lives at risk, especially vulnerable populations that need electricity for medical needs and cannot go days without power.

PG&E treated ratepayers poorly. Their website crashed and the company failed to communicate effectively with residents and local governments. In total, 3 million Californians lost power across nine blackouts, which collectively cost the state’s economy \$10 billion according to Michael Wara of the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment.

It is unacceptable for the largest utility in the state to fail to keep the lights on in Silicon Valley in the 21st century.

Climate change has made wildfires more frequent and more deadly, but that does not absolve PG&E of its responsibility to harden its systems against these increased risks. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today about the steps we can take to protect public health and safety from this ongoing threat.